

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PORT LOUIS 0425

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR PINT PLOS ECON MP SE OAU CG AS
SUBJECT: MAURITIUS WEEKLY REVIEW - APRIL 22

REF: PORT LOUIS 390

SUMMARY. PORT LOUIS 424 PROVIDES A SUMMARY OF THIS CABLE.
END SUMMARY.

1. PUBLIC CAMPAIGNING HAS INCREASED IN TEMPO FOR THE APRIL 24 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS. THERE HAVE BEEN SEVERAL INCIDENTS OF ACTUAL OR THREATENED VIOLENCE BETWEEN SUPPORTERS OF THE PMSD AND THE MMM IN CUREPIPE THE PAST WEEK. THE POLICE RIOT UNIT HAD TO INTERVENE TO STOP INCIDENTS AND BEGAN DAILY PATROLLING ON APRIL 19. A MMM DEPUTY, AMEDEE DARGA, WAS ARRESTED AND CHARGED WITH HAVING THREATENED GAETAN DUVAL AND TWO OTHER PMSD LEADERS. FOR ITS PART THE MMM SAYS TWO OF ITS CANDIDATES IN CUREPIPE WERE "AMBUSHED" AND ASSAULTED BY PMSD THUGS AND HAD TO BE HOSPITALIZED.

2. DUVAL DECLARED IN THE PRESS THAT A CAMPAIGN OF PERSONAL DENIGRATION BASED ON LIES HAS BEEN LAUNCHED AGAINST HIM. HE HAS SCHEDULED A RALLY OF HIS SUPPORTERS FOR APRIL 22 IN CUREPIPE TO ANSWER THESE LIES WITH THE TRUTH, HE SAYS
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3. FINANCE MINISTER RINGADOO, WHO IS COORDINATING THE GOVERNING COALITION'S MUNICIPAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN, GAVE A PRESS CONFERENCE FOR PAPERS FRIENDLY TO THE GOVERNMENT ON APRIL 15. HE DECLARED THAT THE COALITION'S PRINCIPAL ENEMY IS NOT THE MMM, BUT "ABSTENTION." HE ATTACKED THE MMM AS "POLITICAL ADVENTURERS" INTO WHOSE HANDS THE TOWN ADMINISTRATIONS

MUST NOT FALL, AND MADE THE POINT THAT THERE WOULD BE A LACK OF COOPERATION BETWEEN THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT AND THE TOWN ADMINISTRATIONS IF THE MMM CONTROLLED THE LATTER. HE AGAIN LABELLED THE MMM A COMMUNIST PARTY -- DESPITE THE CONTRARY ASSURANCES GIVEN BY JUGNAUTH AND BERENGER -- AND STATED THAT IN DECEMBER THE ELECTORATE HAD PRONOUNCED ITSELF AGAINST THE MMM TAKING POWER AND INSTALLING A SYSTEM WHICH WOULD CHANGE THE STRUCTURES OF THE COUNTRY AND MAURITIANS' WAY OF LIFE. RINGADOO EXHORTED THE COALITION'S SUPPORTERS TO VOTE, FOR ABSTENTIONS WOULD HELP THE MMM. HE STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE OF THESE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS, THE FIRST IN EIGHT YEARS, FOR THEY WILL EITHER GIVE THE GOVERNMENT A VOTE OF CONFIDENCE, OR WILL RESULT IN A SLIDE TOWARD COMMUNISM. HE PROMISED THAT VILLAGE AND DISTRICT COUNCIL ELECTIONS WILL BE HELD SOON.

4. THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY WILL RESUME MEETING APRIL 26. THE LABOR PARTY PLANS TO HOLD 12 SESSIONS IN MAY TO CONSIDER THE 77-78 BUDGET. NO MEETINGS WILL BE HELD IN JUNE, AS MANY MINISTERS WILL BE ABSENT ATTENDING THE OAU MINISTERIAL AND SUMMIT MEETINGS.

5. LABOR MINISTER MOHAMED PLANS TO INTRODUCE IN THE ASSEMBLY AN AMENDMENT TO THE INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS ACT THAT WILL "DO AWAY" WITH THE OBLIGATORY DUES CHECK-OFF SYSTEM NOW IN EFFECT BY WHICH EMPLOYERS COLLECT UNION MEMBERS' DUES AND TURN THEM DIRECTLY OVER TO THE UNIONS. UNIONS WILL STILL BE ABLE TO BENEFIT BY THIS SYSTEM, BUT ONLY UNDER CONTRACTS TO BE NEGOTIATED WITH THE EMPLOYERS, AS THE GOVERNMENT WILL NO CONFIDENTIAL

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LONGER ENFORCE THE CHECK-OFF SYSTEM. COMMENTATORS IN THE PRESS HAVE DETECTED A "WHIFF OF POLITICS" IN THIS, SPECIFICALLY AN ATTEMPT BY THE GOVERNMENT TO WEAKEN THE MMM TRADE UNION MOVEMENT UNDER THE BANNER OF THE GENERAL WORKERS FEDERATION (GWF). IT IS WELL-KNOWN THAT THE MMM RECEIVES A GOOD DEAL OF ITS FINANCING THROUGH THE DUES RECEIPTS OF THE TRADE UNIONS WHICH SUPPORT THE PARTY. THIS PROPOSED CHANGE MAY MAKE IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR THE MMM-CONTROLLED UNIONS TO COLLECT THEIR MEMBERS' DUES. THE MMM'S LE MILITANT SAYS THE GWF IS VERY UNHAPPY WITH THE PROPOSED AMENDMENT, ESPECIALLY BECAUSE THERE WAS NOT PRIOR CONSULTATION.

6. SEVEN TRADE UNION FEDERATIONS, INCLUDING SEVERAL NOT UNDER MMM CONTROL, HAVE MET AND LODGED A JOINT PROTEST. THEY SAY THE PROPOSED MEASURE IS "RETROGRADE" AND AIMED AT WEAKENING THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT. THEY ACCUSED THE LABOR MINISTER OF BYPASSING THE LABOR ADVISORY BOARD (LAB), IN VIOLATION OF THE ILO CONVENTION. (COOPERATION AMONG THE VARIOUS FEDERATIONS IS VERY RARE IN MAURITIUS.) THE

FEDERATIONS ARE THREATENING TO WITHDRAW EN MASSE FROM THE LAB TO CALL A GENERAL STRIKE.

7. DESPITE THE FUROR, LABOR MINISTE MOHAMED TOLD THE PRESS HE INTENDS TO PROCEED. HE SAID HE ENJOYS THE SUPPORT OF THE WORKERS, WHO ARE EXPLOITED BY SOME UNSCRUPULOUS UNION LEADERS. MOHAMED SAID HE HAD FOUND FROM STUDYING THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS OF THE UNIONS THAT MOST OF THE MONEY THEY COLLECT IN DUES GOES TO PAY SALARIES OF OFFICERS AND STAFF AND LEGAL COUNSEL, AND NOTHING FOR "BENEFITS TO MEMBERS." HIS ONLY CONCESSION WAS TO AGREE TO SUBMIT THE MATTER TO THE LAB, AND TO PROPOSE A COMMISSION TO STUDY UNION FINANCES.

8. PRIME MINISTER RAMGOOLAM'S INTERVIEW WITH AFP IN PARIS IN WHICH HE SUPPORTED THE FRENCH-MOROCCAN INVOLVEMENT IN ZAIRE AND DECLARED AFRICA'S "SOLIDARITY" WITH MOBUTU NATURALLY RECEIVED WIDE PLAY IN LOCAL PRESS. STRANGELY, CONFIDENTIAL

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THERE WAS NOT A SINGLE WORD OF EDITORIAL COMMENT ON HIS REMARKS. RAM TOOK THE POSITION, SPEAKING FOR THE OAU, THAT THE TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY OF AFRICAN STATES MUST BE PRESERVED AND ON THIS BASIS CAME OUT AGAINST THE ERITREAN REBELS. HE EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT IN BOTH CASES SOLUTIONS WOULD BE FOUND THROUGH DEMOCRATIC MEANS AND WITHOUT FURTHER VIOLENCE.

9. RAMGOOLAM ATTENDED THE SOCIALIST INTERNATIONAL MEETING IN AMSTERDAM AND THE FRANCO-AFRICAN SUMMIT IN DAKAR.

10. BEFORE RETURNING TO THE SEYCHELLES ON APRIL 17 (REFTTEL), PRIME MINISTER RENE SPENT MOST OF THE WEEKEND MEETING WITH THE LEADERS OF THE MMM. A MMM SPOKESMAN TOLD THE PRESS THAT THE DISCUSSION CONCERNED DEMILITARIZATION OF THE INDIAN OCEAN AND THE IDEA (BERENGER'S) OF A CONFERENCE OF ALL THE "PROGRESSIVE" PARTIES OF THE REGION, THROUGH A "DEFINITIVE CONCLUSION" WAS NOT REACHED. HOWEVER, IN A PRESS INTERVIEW RENE DECLARED THAT HE FAVORS INSTEAD A CONFERENCE OF GOVERNMENTS (RATHER THAN PARTIES) OF THE REGION IN ORDER TO ALERT WORLD OPINION ON THIS SUBJECT. RENE ALSO SAID HE DOES NOT BELIEVE IN A SOCIETY OF CLASSES, NOR IN LABELS SUCH AS MARXISM, BELIEVES HIS COUNTRY NEEDS TO PRESERVE A MIXED ECONOMY FOR THE PRESENT, WITH ONLY LIMITED NATIONALIZATIONS, AND IN GENERAL SOUNDED MUCH MORE MODERATE THAN HIS FRIEND PAUL BERENGER.

11. ONE RESULT OF RENE'S VISIT WAS APPARENTLY A JOINT DECISION OF MAURITIUS AND THE SYECHELLES TO EXTEND THEIR EXCLUSIVE ECONOMIC ZONES TO 200 MILES OFF-SHORE. THERE WAS ALSO TALK OF THE TWO COUNTRIES COOPERATING IN EXPLOITATION OF UNDERSEA RESOURCES IN THEIR RESPECTIVE ZONES.

12. MAURITIUS WILL SOON ESTABLISH A RESIDENT HIGH COMMISSION IN CANBERRA. THE POST WILL BE OPENED BY CHITMANSING JESSERAMSING, NOW FIRST SECRETARY IN WASHINGTON. THE FIRST HIGH COMMISSIONER WILL BE RAYMOND DEVIENNE, FORMER MINISTER OF HEALTH WHO HAS
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RETIRED FROM POLITICS. SOME 25,000 MAURITIANS HAVE EMIGRATED TO AUSTRALIA IN RECENT YEARS.

13. THE GOVERNMENT THIS WEEK AGREED TO REDUCE THE WORK WEEK FOR CIVIL SERVANTS TO 40 HOURS EFFECTIVE JULY 1, THUS CARRYING OUT A LONG-TIME PROMISE. THE CIVIL SERVICE WORK WEEK WAS LAST REDUCED IN 1959, WHEN IT WENT FROM 48 TO 45 HOURS.

14. FOR THE FIRST TIME IN FIVE MONTHS THERE WAS SOME BUYING ACTIVITY ON THE LOCAL STOCK MARKET, AS 13 OF 18 ISSUES OFFERED FOR SALE FOUND BUYERS. BUT OBSERVERS WERE CAUTIOUS IN INTERPRETING THIS RESULT AS A CHANGE OF ATTITUDE BY INVESTORS, FOR ALL THE SALES WERE BY A NON-RESIDENT WHO WAS LIQUIDATING HIS ASSETS AT VERY LOW ASKING PRICES, AND MOST OF THE ISSUES WERE BOUGHT BY A SINGLE MAURITIAN BUYER. PRICES OF SOME SUGAR ESTATE ISSUES FELL DRASTICALLY.
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